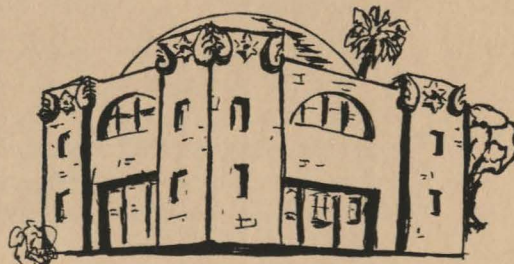


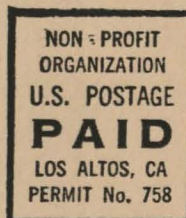
The K.J.A. Bulletin

OCT. 85

TISHREI 5746



K.J.A.
P.O. BOX 4235
MTN VIEW, CA. 94040



TO:

David Ovadia

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A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear friend,

Our Board of Directors and Acting Rab, Joe Pessah, join me in wishing you and your family a very happy and prosperous New Year 5746.

Review of 5745

Several important new programs and activities were initiated during the past year. A major article about the Karaites was published as the cover story of the Northern California Jewish Bulletin in its September 6, 1985, issue. This article has generated a good deal of interest in Karaite Judaism as well as some excellent publicity for us. As a result of the article, numerous synagogues have requested us to provide additional information about our traditions and practices.

Letter from Senator Marks

Indicative of the interest and support that we have recently received was the kind letter from California Senator Milton Marks in which he expressed his appreciation for our traditions:

"I appreciate the fine work you are doing to preserve your traditions, and I look forward to working with you on matters of mutual concern. Whenever I may be of assistance, please call upon me."

Activities

Three major events took place. A highly entertaining and successful Purim party was held at the Belmont Jewish Community Center in February with an attendance exceeding 120 persons. KJA's First Annual Childrens Camp took place during the summer at Lake Del Valle in Livermore. The last major event of the year was the Annual Picnic at Lake Elizabeth in Fremont, with soccer and boating as special activities.

Religious Activities

Torah reading sessions began on a monthly basis and our regular monthly prayer and services have been improved. One of our members, Jacob Pessah, is currently on a mission to Israel to learn more about our religious practices. Acting Rab Joe Pessah also recently visited Israel for the first time and made contacts in Jerusalem, Ramleh, and Ashdod. During his visit, Acting Rab Pessah was fortunate to be able to celebrate the inauguration of a new Karaite synagogue in Ramleh.

The Year to Come

The past year, 5745, was a successful one, and I am confident that 5746 will be even better with God's help and with your individual continuing support. KJA is indeed fulfilling a most positive and greater role in the worldwide Jewish Community at large. You made it possible with your continued support and commitments. Thanks to God! And thanks to you personally!

Coming up soon on our calendar is the Second Annual Fund-Raising Drive, followed by the election of a new Board of Directors.

I urge you to participate fully in order to achieve our shared goals. And I personally wish you my very best for 5746.

MAY GOD BLESS YOU ALL

Jacob Masliah
President

Selected topics from the KJA BOARD MEETINGS:

- The purchase of religious books not to exceed \$300.00 was approved. A generous donation by ALAN OVADIA, EMIL KHEDER and FRED LICHAA was made to cover the entire cost of the book's purchase.

- The board has approved \$1700.00 to partially fund JACOB PESSAH six weeks trip to ISRAEL. \$700.00 of the \$1700.00 were donated by the board members. Among many of JACOB PESSAH'S assignments: recording the high holiday's prayers, get definite answers on what it will take to certify a person to perform marriages, "BRITH MILA" and other religious functions.

- The first annual KJA picnic was approved as well as the first annual KJA kids camp.

- ALAN OVADIA, our treasurer, is relocating to LOS ANGELES and has submitted his resignation to the president. The board presented him with a recognition plaque at a surprise dinner party given in his honor by the members and their wives.

- JOE OVADIA was unanimously approved as a new board member.

- ELIE MOUSSA was elected as our new treasurer and will serve the remaining term of this position.

- The board agreed to partially fund a personal computer to do the accounting/bookkeeping and the KJA bulletin. A suggestion was made to advertise in the bulletin for the need of a second IBM compatible computer and the set up of a COMPUTER FUND.

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N E W S

A PURIM party was held on MARCH 9, 1985 at a rented hall. Games and children activities were organised by ABRAHAM & JEAN MASSUDA. Adults activities included music and belly dancing. "Koshari, falafel & baklava" were among many of the delicacies savoured by more than one hundred people attending the festivities. The highlight of the evening was the traditional lighting of the candles placed in a candle holder shaped like a star of DAVID made by ALBERT PESSAH.

The SAN FRANCISCO JEWISH BULLETIN featured the KARAITE jews in their front page culminating a year long effort by KJA board members with the BULLETIN'S staff. The article generated a genuine enthusiasm from jewish synagogues and leaders to find out more about KARAISM.

The kids enjoyed decorating and building the SUKKA with fruits at the home of MOUSSA & SARINA PESSAH during SUKKOT celebration.

Introducing the EDITOR

I would like to take this opportunity to thank JOE PESSAH for donating his time and efforts for the past years in order to produce the KJA bulletin. JOE was so happy to have someone carry on the task of producing the bulletin that he donated to KJA a basic IBM PC that I am working on now.

I just received the computer two hours ago and after struggling with the word processing manual on how to type these paragraphs, I realized how tedious it is to type a bulletin. Our thanks to you REMY PESSAH for your past effort and ongoing desire to keep on helping.

Another person who spends many hours in producing the bulletin is MAURICE PESSAH. We can always count on him to spend night after night to xerox thousands of pages.

Our special thanks to the bulletin assembly line crew that spend numerous hours gathering the bulletin sheets, stapling them, stuffing envelopes and sorting them by zip code to reduce the mailing cost.

Now is the time to introduce myself: FRED LICHAA. If you are wondering how I look like, I am the one leading the prayer in front of the following page. I am a board member and I recently was one of the volunteer's first annual KJA camp for kids. Once a month with the help of ELIE MOUSSA I set up our prayer's hall to the Karaite's traditions. Besides leading the prayer, one of my responsibilities is to collect the names for ZEKHER, BERAKHOT and donations to the "Hazzan" when opening the TORAH.

If you have any news that you would like to announce in the bulletin, I will do my best to report it accurately and in a timely fashion.

ADVERTISEMENT

KJA is in need of a modem as well as an IBM compatible PC to be used for handling the finances of KJA. If you would like to help, please send your donation to KJA specifying Computer Fund.

Thank you: ALAN OVADIA

The KJA board accepted sadly the resignation of its treasurer ALAN OVADIA who was transferred to Southern California. Alan will be sorely missed not only as a board member but as a staunch KJA supporter. Let's wish him good luck and we hope he can provide religious leadership to our community in LOS ANGELES.

OUR COVER STORY: The people of the scriptures



Photo by Ira Nowinski

Facing Jerusalem, members of the Karaite Jews of America follow their ancient tradition of kneeling in prayer. The congregation prays together once a month at Peninsula Sinai Congregation in Foster City.

Bay Area Karaites cling to their traditions

By PEGGY ISAAK GLUCK
Of the Bulletin Staff

They are a minority within a minority, even here in the Bay Area, a group of Jews trying to hold onto their ancient customs and heritage — which includes kneeling while they pray.

They all come from Cairo, where the once-thriving Karaite Jewish community has dwindled since 1948 with the founding of the state of Israel, as thousands left in waves because of religious persecution.

Today, there's just a handful of Karaites left in Cairo, with others scattered around the world (in Israel, in Europe — and in the United States, where about 400 Karaite fam-

✓ San Franciscan Ira Nowinski photographs Karaites of Egypt. See story, Page 14.

ilies have settled).

But the Bay Area — with the largest concentration of Karaites in this country (125 families) — is the only place outside Israel where Karaites, which means people of the scriptures, have organized. Because of this, Karaite Jews in communities throughout the United States look to San Francisco for their cultural ties.

"It's a challenge being a Jew in the United States," says Joe Abel of San Ramon, vice president of the San Francisco-based Karaite Jews of America (KJA), a religious, cul-

tural and social organization. "But being Karaite is even more difficult than [just] being Jewish in America. It's even more difficult for us because we're very few people, and we're dispersed all over the United States."

Nevertheless, Abel, KJA president Jacob Masliah of San Francisco, and all the Bay Area Karaite families feel it's essential to preserve the culture and heritage of their forefathers.

The history of the Karaite Jews dates to the eighth century. Although their unique tradition in some ways differs from the rabbinic (mainstream) tradition that the major-

(See BAY AREA'S, Page 40)

Bay Area's Karaite Jews cling to their tradition . . .

(Continued from Page 1)

ity of Jews follow today, some of the Karaite traditions are identical.

Basically, the Karaites, who originated in Babylon, reject the oral law and instead follow fundamentalist tenets. This is based on the teachings of the sect's founder, Anan ben David, and his *Sefer ha-Mitzvot*, the book of commandments, which lists the rules of the Bible without taking the law of the rabbis into consideration. According to the *Encyclopedia Judaica*, efforts at reconciliation with mainstream Judaism failed over the years because of the Karaite's rejection of "Rabbinite distortion and corruption."

Karaites believe in the written laws of Moses only as they appear in the Bible. In contrast, so-called rabbinical Judaism follows two laws, the written one and the oral law.

Furthermore, they will abstain from sexual relations the day before entering their holy synagogues, in addition to following other laws of *taharas mikveh* (family purity), but they do not use the *mikveh* (ritual bath).

Karaite worshippers — men and women, who are separated — remove their shoes before entering their synagogues, which has no chairs or pews, according to Joseph Pessah of Los Altos, the *rav* (rabbi-teacher) of the KJA. This practice comes from the verse in Exodus, he says, where "God talked to Moses and told him to remove the shoes from his feet because he was on holy ground."

This form of prayer, "or witnessing the holy spirit," is how the Karaites view their devotions to God, Pessah explains.

A *hazzan* (cantor) by training, Pessah leads



Joseph Pessah
... rav of KJA

the KJA in prayer at 9:30 a.m. the first Saturday of every month at Peninsula Sinai Congregation in Foster City, which has provided the Karaite congregation with a room for their special services.

Their prayer, Pessah says, is "mainly verses from the Torah and the Psalms," and consists of responsive reading. As he recites a line, the congregation repeats it.

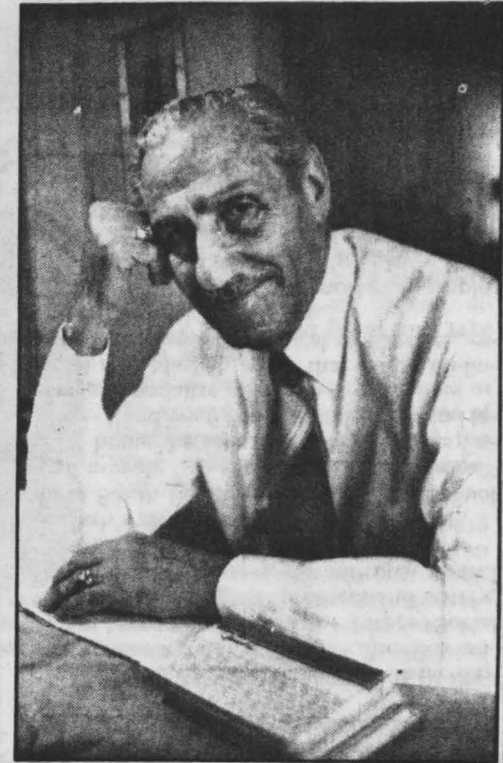
As the congregation faces Jerusalem, prayers "tend to be penitential in nature," centering around the loss of that city, he explains. "We acknowledge we've made sins and Jerusalem is lost. Jerusalem's centrality is the backbone of our practices in the synagogue."

The Karaites, whose *minhag* (ritual) is the same all over the world, use a prayerbook "with no translations, all in Hebrew," Pessah notes.

And Masliah adds that the musical chants of the service are Middle Eastern, with the Hebrew pronunciation being classic Sephardic.

Last year, Masliah says, a professional musicologist from Israel came to KJA to record the Karaites' ancient chants. There are few differences between the chants of the Bay Area Karaites and others, he contends, "because the majority of us are from Egypt. [Our] rabbis maintain the songs the same way, learning from only one source."

Masliah, who sometimes attends services at Congregation Magain David Sephardim in San Francisco, says that it has "similar melodies, and the pronunciations are close." Still, Magain David Sephardim's service, spiritually, is far removed from the one he grew up with in Cairo.



Jacob Masliah
... preserving tradition

The *minhag* isn't the only substantial difference between Karaites and rabbinic Jews. A part of the Karaite service, Pessah says, mandates that the worshipper bend at the knee. "People must fall with their face to the knee." (Continued on next page)

...to teach their children the ways of their ancestors

(Continued from previous page)

ground. We take this as being prostration. This is our interpretation of kneeling."

The Karaites also observe their holy days differently in some cases. When Yom Kippur falls on a Friday, mainstream rabbis shift the observance day to Saturday; Karaites do not.

"The feasts are the same," Pessah explains, "but they may not fall on the same day. We observe on the same day as mentioned in the Bible."

This year, Abel notes, the High Holy Days (services will be at the Pessah home) and festivals coincide in both calendars.

Meanwhile, Karaites, who do not don *tefillin* (phylacteries), use a Passover *haggadah* with elements unfamiliar to mainstream Jewry. And Chanukah, which is not mentioned in the Bible, is not recognized by the Karaite community.

Some Torah laws, such as *brit milah* (circumcision), have the same impact for Karaites as for followers of the rabbinic tradition. In contrast, however, is the bar or bat mitzvah: Though Karaite tradition does not include celebrations for those ritualistic passages, Karaites in this country do at least take note of them.

The reason for this, Joe Pessah, Joe Abel and Jacob Masliah agree, is education. Karaites, they say, want to teach their children Judaism in general — all the while preserving their precious heritage.

The problem, they say, is that Jewish education in this country means only the rabbinic tradition. "We have difficulties trying to teach our children Jewish tradition. Between the two [traditions], which way do [the children] go? It's confusing for them to an extent," Abel explains.

Though KJA has been holding services at the Peninsula synagogue for more than three years, they've been praying in each other's homes for more than 20 — since they began leaving en masse from Cairo because of persecution.

With their social network firmly established even before they left Cairo, Masliah says, they had "come to my house off and on over the years" to pray. But as more Karaites settled in the Bay Area, their social and religious network kept growing.

Abel, Masliah and Pessah agree that mem-

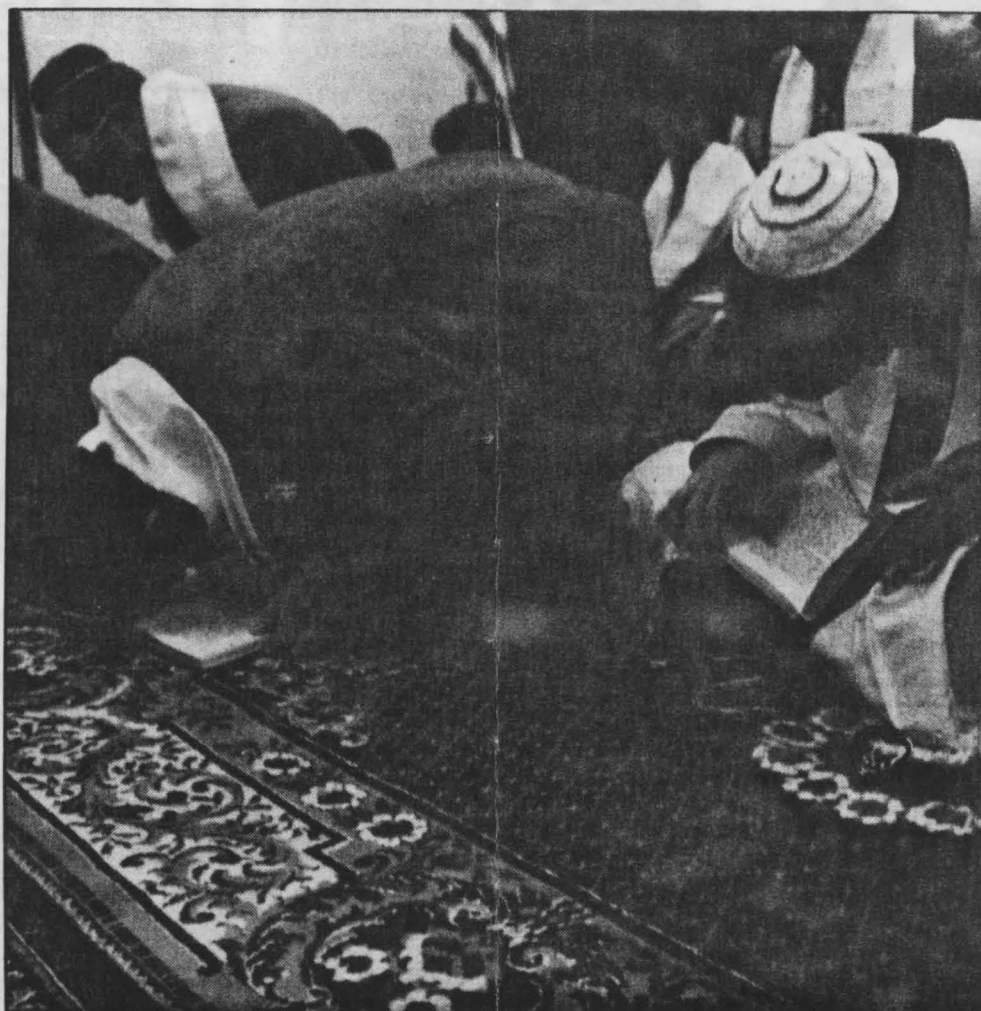


Photo by Ira Nowinski

Members of the Karaite Jews of America bow in prayer during a Shabbat service at Peninsula Sinai Congregation.

bers of the Karaite community, in the Bay Area and across the United States, all are related in some way or another.

For example, the clan Masliah (nee Saleh in Arabic, "which means good, and so does *masliah*") came to San Francisco in 1964. It is related to the Abel (nee Abdallah) family, which came in 1966.

The Pessahs, who came in 1971 (Joe Pessah says he had spent three years in prison before he and his wife, Raymonde, were allowed to leave), also had family here.

"We are all as one family," insists Masliah, "and we all care for each other. We are all connected together, and always in contact, even when someone moves."

Meanwhile, the KJA members have expanded their dreams to include a synagogue of their own, where they can pray together and "try to have our customs revived," according to Abel. "We want a sanctuary and a rabbi to teach our children our traditions and heritage and religion."

KJA members, while grateful for the use of

Peninsula Sinai Congregation, feel strongly that "it's not our own," Abel added. "We can't do all the activities we want because there's conflicts with their activities."

The difficulty in building a synagogue is a common one, however — raising funds.

Still, praying together is the one way Karaites have to preserve their culture in the United States. "What made our congregation survive in Cairo was the closeness in our ghetto," Pessah explains. With no assimilation or intermarriage, the community was able to survive, he says. "But even geography here puts us in an adverse situation. Our congregation is trying to preserve what we've got."

This summer KJA sponsored a three-day camp for their children. Other cultural activities are being planned for the future. Social events always bring out brothers and sisters, cousins, second cousins, distant cousins, and other *mishpochah* (family).

Pessah's children, David, 9, and Jacob, 7, attend South Peninsula Hebrew Day School in Sunnyvale "so they can learn Hebrew." But at home, he says, the family speaks English — "and we fight in Arabic, pray in Hebrew, and socialize in French."

Abel and Masliah agree that the multi-lingual Pessah family is typical of Karaites, especially in the United States.

Abel's two children, as another example, attend religious school at Congregation B'nai Shalom in Walnut Creek. "Rather than not teaching them anything," they go to that school, he says, noting that their lessons "are supplemented by our prayers."

Last month, Joe Pessah spoke about his Jewish roots at Peninsula Temple Shalom in Burlingame. "Only two or three of them had heard of Karaites," he says.

Masliah and Abel knew of Pessah's talk. And they described it as wonderful because many other Jews learned about their ancient and proud tradition.

That tradition, concludes Abel, is kept up "with weddings two or three times a year, sometimes more," and *brit milot* (one was held last week), and the monthly services. But the goal is that projected synagogue. "Just a hall is all we want" for now, says Masliah, "to have a place that belongs to us. We want to be more than just a post box."

S.F. photographer captures Karaite life in the Mideast

By MARSHALL KRANTZ
Special to the Bulletin

Photographing the remnants of Jewish Karaite culture in Cairo was an iffy proposition for Ira Nowinski. It required a combination of persistence and delicacy, and plenty of *baksheesh* — bribes.

"I didn't even go to the pyramids, I was so intent on getting in to photograph the Karaite synagogues and cemetery," said Nowinski, 43, of San Francisco.

Nowinski recently spent two-and-a-half weeks in the Mideast photographing Jewish life in Cairo and the Karaites of Israel. He said it is "semi-illegal" to visit the Karaite synagogues. The Egyptian government doesn't "want people going in there and taking pictures," he said.

Nowinski's task was not made easier by the fact that the old Karaite section of Cairo is now inhabited by Islamic fundamentalist Arabs. "We were the only Westerners there," he said of himself and an Israeli companion who served as his interpreter and guide.

Nowinski said he had to pay bribes to "practically everyone," primarily taxi drivers and synagogue caretakers. He said he was relentless in pursuing his objective, but also knew when to back off, such as when he didn't press to photograph the Karaites' large collection of books, which includes a ninth-century Bible.

His efforts paid off, however, and his rare glimpse into what was for centuries the center of Karaite cultural life in the Mideast will be shared when Nowinski's photo-

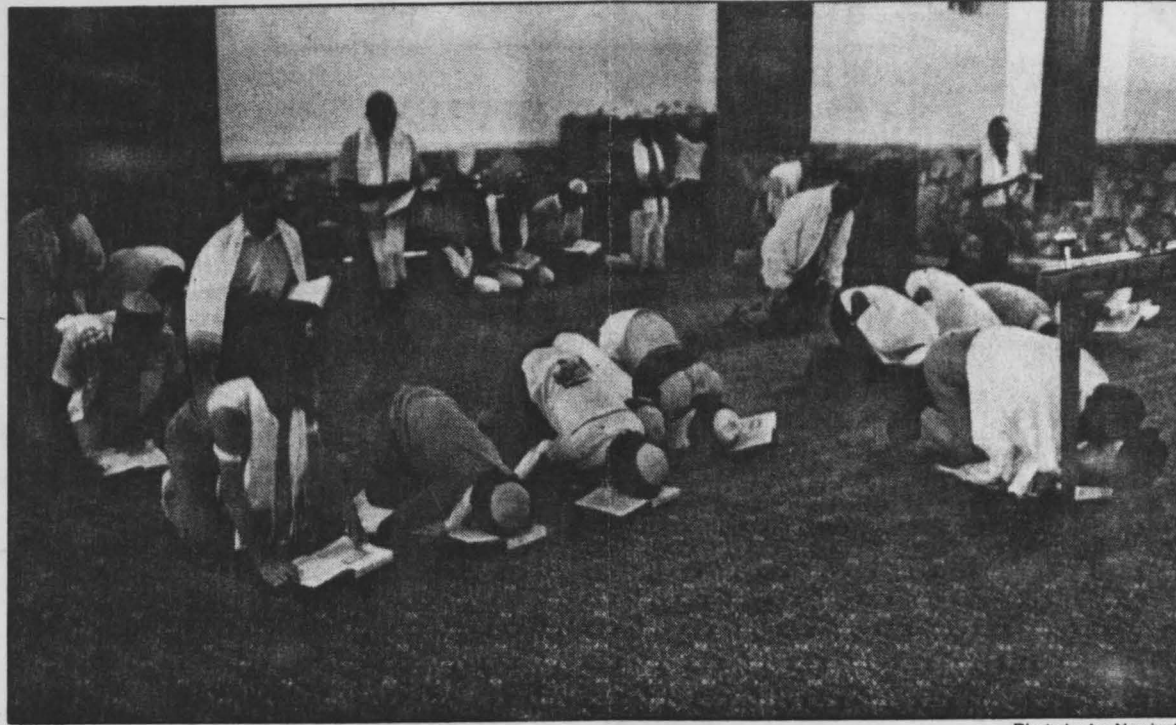


Photo by Ira Nowinski

Karaite Jews in the synagogue in Ashdod, Israel pray in their traditional style — kneeling in reverence of God. This photograph is one taken by Nowinski during his visits to Karaite Jews in Egypt and Jerusalem. The photographic study was commissioned by the Judah Magnes Museum of Berkeley.

graphs go on exhibit under the aegis of the Judah L. Magnes Museum in Berkeley next year. The Magnes has commissioned him to photograph Karaite Jews to record the people and their struggle to preserve their cultural identity.

Karaism, formed as a separate branch of Judaism in the eighth century, continued a long-standing opposition of some Jews to the oral law as embodied in the Talmud, according to William Brinner, profes-

sor of Near East Studies at U.C. Berkeley, who also recently studied the Karaites in Cairo and Israel. Karaites accept only the written law — the Torah and the Bible, he explained.

The Karaite movement spread throughout the Jewish world, reached its height in the ninth and 10th centuries, and declined after that, according to Brinner. Today, he said, the Karaites number about 35,000 people worldwide. About

18,000 reside in Israel, the major Karaite community, with Karaites living in Europe, the Soviet Union, Turkey, and the United States. The largest community in the United States is centered in the Bay Area and numbers about 125 families.

What Nowinski saw in Cairo, among other things, was the once-opulent main Karaite synagogue now in severe disrepair, another Karaite synagogue turned into a plastics factory, the Karaite ceme-

tery being desecrated for housing development, and three of the dozen remaining members of the Cairo Karaite community.

None of the dozen Karaite synagogues now are used for worship, Nowinski said, and some of them are occupied by Coptic Christians or Moslems, who the government has placed in the synagogues to act as caretakers.

The former main Karaite synagogue, along with its prayer rugs, is now dirty and deteriorated, he reported. Ornaments on the building's exterior have been removed, and the windows are broken, allowing pigeons to fly in and take roost, he said.

But an office still is maintained in the synagogue by what remains of the Karaite community, and the book collection is watched carefully, Nowinski said.

Nowinski also photographed five synagogues in Cairo that had been places of worship for the mainstream Jewish community, now reduced to only 200 people, he reported. The Egyptian government has been forcing Jews out of Egypt, especially after each Arab-Israeli war — or the Jews have fled.

In illustration of the state of the Jewish community's decline in Cairo, Nowinski said a *minyán* could not be formed the Friday night he and his guide attended services at the Great Synagogue, the only Jewish synagogue still in use in Cairo. Two other Americans, one other Israeli, and three Cairo residents attended the service. "No one else came. It was kind of sad,"

(See KARAITES, Page 15)

Karaites' community photographed

(Continued from Page 14)
the photographer said.

Nowinski met the three leaders of Cairo's Karaite community — two men and one woman, in their 50s and 60s — at the main Karaite synagogue. They spoke together for a few hours, and Nowinski photographed them. He observed of the remaining Karaites, "It's obvious that they're really trying to preserve their culture."

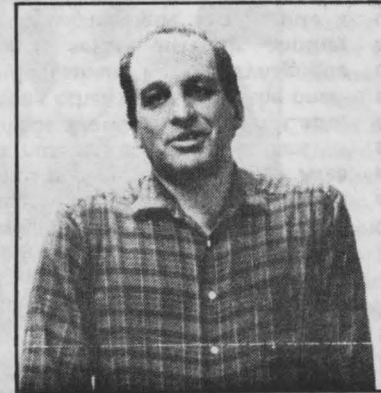
He said the Karaites have mixed feelings about whether to keep the book collection, which they cannot adequately maintain, or relinquish it to an organization that can.

Nowinski also saw the Karaites' veneration of books, both in what he was allowed to photograph (Ka-

raités touching their foreheads to prayer books when kneeling to pray) and in what he was not allowed to photograph (the large collection of books).

The Karaites wouldn't allow Nowinski upstairs in the main Karaite Synagogue to photograph their book collection, partly, he believes, out of embarrassment at the collection's deteriorated state, and partly out of a desire to maintain a low profile. He said the Karaites of Istanbul kept secret their collection of 11th- and 12th-century Bibles until only recently. "Books played a very large part in their lives," he reported.

"They're trying to keep their religion and culture intact, but they're



Ira Nowinski

... study of Karaites

afraid they're losing the battle," said Nowinski of all the Karaite communities. "They're afraid of assimilating. They're afraid of disappearing."

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AND ECONOMY
STATUS OF WOMEN

September 16, 1985

Mr. Jacob Masliah, President
Karaite Jews of America
1626 41st Avenue
San Francisco, CA 94122

Dear Jacob,

I read with interest the excellent Cover Story appearing in the Northern California Jewish Bulletin about the Karaite Jews of America, and I want to send you and your members my best wishes.

I appreciate the fine work you are doing to preserve your traditions, and I look forward to working with you on matters of mutual concern. Whenever I may be of assistance, please call upon me.

May you and the KJA enjoy peace, health and happiness during the High Holy Days and in the year to come.

L'Shana Tova,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Milton Marks".

MILTON MARKS

MM:clb